
This narrative was written late in Mother's life—possibly in the early stages of Alzheimer's. John had asked her to narrate her memories to a tape recorder that he gave her, but she was never comfortable speaking to a microphone. I tried to change very little in copying her narrative. I did indicate some sentence breaks that Mother did not show to help a reader and I added just a little punctuation to set off parenthetical phrases that were inserted into sentences and a few commas to help the reader follow lists more easily. The computer added apostrophes in contractions. I tried to edit them out to go back to how mother wrote it, but I may not have gotten them all.

Mother and Dad did quite well, despite having little to start with. They had little formal education (Mother dropped out of school when she was eleven, and Dad finished high school at a country school in Hackneyville), but they were both very intelligent. They both were deeply affected by the hard times of the great depression of the thirties. They almost always had a piece of land on which they raised cows, hogs, and chickens and always had a garden to grow vegetables which they canned or froze. We ate well. As they became better off, they stopped raising the livestock and chickens, but they always put up a year's supply of vegetables. Some of this rubbed off on me and I still want a retreat to go to.

Mother was always a hard worker. Until the later years she made almost all her own clothes, and in the earlier years she made the children's clothes too. Mother was known as a meticulous housekeeper. One of her sisters said there were no bugs in Mother's house because it was so clean they would starve to death. Mother was very saving—a trait many depression era folk shared. It was this trait that made them pretty comfortable in their later years despite never having made much money. They both

worked in cotton mills most of their lives and never made decent salaries. Mother inspected cloth and Dad fixed anything that stopped working.

Dad had an amazing mechanical ability. He and I (age 4) built the house we lived in until most of the kids were gone and Mother and Dad could afford something nicer. He did the carpentry work, wired the house for electricity (after we finally were able to get electricity to the house—several years), dug the well with pick and shovel, and installed the plumbing after we got a well pump. Until modern electronics, he could fix anything on an automobile. We seldom called a repair man. Dad was a very good baseball player and played industrial league (almost semi-pro) ball in this youth. He was also a gifted hunter and rifle shot. He never did formal target shooting like I do, but could hit both running and flying shots with a rifle—the kind of shooting needed for hunting.

When Dad died, one of the neighbors said that they had never seen either Mother or Dad without the other. In their early years they had it rough, but through hard work and living frugally, they raised five children (four with college degrees and three of those with graduate work) and made themselves quite comfortable. John once asked me how all the kids came out with such a strong moral code. He said Mother and Dad never lectured to us. I told John that they didn't need to. We had their lives to follow.

Robert

Tensie Lee Tanton Hutchinson

Born May 4, 1911, to Ella Lee Forbus Tanton and Jessie Russell Tanton

We moved to Texas. This is about the first I can remember 1915. We moved to Texas. We went by train, crossing Mississippi on the ferry waiting our turn to cross carrying part of the train at a the time. I was about 4 ½ yrs old. That was something to me. While we lived out there we went on trip in covered wagon our family and another family. The families cooked up food carried along to eat on the way. We would get out walk a while then ride while. I don't remember how far it was but was a long ride, but I guess with two mules pulling wagon we didn't break the speed limit. We visited my daddy Uncle Jeff. I had fun on the road. In them days the cotton farmers had geese. They drove flocks geese from cotton field to field. They ate the crap [crab] grass. We lived two yrs out there. First winter it came big snow the people got out tracked rabbits the old jack rabbits. I thought that would be fun but wasn't big enough for that. The huckle berry trees was something to me. My daddy didn't think they was good for us to eat. He told us not to eat them but I climed the tree but lost my hand hold come down the tree skinned my stomache and did it hurt but I knew I had better not tell.

We moved back to our home place in Ala 1917. My first yr in school was the yr we moved back. I had to walk about 1 ½ miles to school. I wont ever forget my teacher was Miss Marry Adams. I was so homesick I would cry. She would hold me on her lap during recess but I made first and second grade that yr. Children them days didnt have toys bought like of today. We made our thing to play with. We would saw log for wheels

make wagons made whistles out of poplar [poplar] in the spring when the poplar bark would skin off. We made sling shots, stilts, rock throwers out of corn stalks and many other things.

We went one summer to visit my Grandfather Tanton's in wagon. We stopped at a store. My mother bought me a white straw hat with blue ribbon streamer and tennis shoes. I was so dressed up I was so proud of them I felt like a million air. We didn't get things like people today. I never saw either one of my Grandmothers, only one of my Granddaddys. They was dead back in my childhood days. We didn't get much extra mostly the necessities. We lived on the farm when I was growing up. Believe me we had plenty to do milk the cows, churn the butter, feed the hogs and the chickens, draw water from the wells, get the wood in for fireplace. We had wood burning cooking stoves. Laundry by hand with rub board. Boil the clothes in big wash pot. Draw all the water for that. Do the laundry. Hang the clothes out on the line. Sometimes they would freeze by the time could get them on the line. We then had to iron the clothes with old flat iron heated in front of fireplace. We starched most of the clothes such as wearing clothes, pillow cases and so forth. We had cotton cloth. Then of course we didn't have indoor toilets, rain, snow, sleet or shine. But we made it. The people them days on the farm raised most of their food. We would shell bushel or more corn to carry to gris mill to be ground for meal. We would do that after our dinner at night

People didn't have screen doors and windows. In the summer our doors was open. Our dog and another dog started fighting one night. My Daddy run shut the doors pull down the windows. It was a rabid dog. We all cried we loved our dog so much. He had to be killed. We moved from there to Alex City, Ala lived little while. My parents bought

farm about twelve miles from Alexander City. My mother had a stroke while we lived at Alex City after we moved, that was I think in 1923. We had cattle, turkeys, chickens, gunies [guineas], hogs, pigs. We was selling cream to creamery, milking several cows by hand. My Mother didn't live long, maby year or more after we moved. I was the oldest girl at home. Earline was 4 yrs old. Our mother was 43 yrs old when she died with a stroke. We missed her so much but life had to go on. I finished that year in school. That was my last year in school. I was about eleven yrs old. We had to carry things on. The school was one big room with wood heater in middle of the room. We didn't have toilets there. The girls would go down the side of the hill. The boys went opsit way. I played basket ball. I played center. We wore big full black bloomers. We had to get water from a spring to drink. We had folding drink cups but at home we all drank from same dipper. We made dipper out of goards [gourds]. We would leave them at spring to drink from. Back in my days people canned and dried their fruits and vegetables. We had what we called smoke house. We would kill hog and grind the sausage put them long sack. People made the sacks, stuffed them with sausage, hang them in the smoke house to dry. Would trim the fat from the meat, cut it into small pieces, then we would cook that in wash pot. Would have to cook that slow and long time until the meat got brown then strain through cloth while it was still hot. That where we got our cracklins and lard from [also strokes and heart attacks—rh]. We salted our meat down in big wooden box. After six weeks we would take it up, wash the salt off, hang the meat in the smoke house. Would smoke the hams with hickory wood, just enough fire to make the smoke. I think the meat was better than the way its cured now. We would make cracklin bread and use the lard. We didn't buy shortening. In fact we bought our flour and sugar, coffee and other little things. We

had coffee mills and ground our coffee beans. We had to roast the coffee beans before we could grind it. We had honey bees. They would rob the bees we would have honey and fresh churned butter. Almost make me hungry now. We would kill chicken have it fried for breakfast. Was good them days. We would take our milk to spring in bucket with lid to let it get cool for dinner. At night sometimes we would let it down in the well far enough for it to cool. We didn't run out of something to do. But when Sunday came we made good of that. We would go to the woods, climb trees. We would swing from one tree to the other where they was thick enough. We would walk logs, jump ditches and streames. We would see who could out do the other Arthur, Christine, and my self. As I think back its a wonder we didnt get killed. When Christmas came the grown ups would cook up pies and cakes and lots goodies. We didn't have refrigerator. Mother would keep the pies in stove oven. Arthur had goat. H e came in house messed up some of the pies. When Christmas came Santa Clause came to see us. We would get maby two apples, two oranges, little stick candy, some raisins, maby some nuts. The raisins was the kind with seed in them. They was dried on the steam [stem]. If I saw a little .25 doll head sticking out of my stocking I was happy. We would make our goodies last as long as we could. We knew Xmas didn't come but once a year. In sumer we would make skirts out of green leaves. Take straw, break them in short pieces to pin the leaves together. We would play all Sunday in the woods.

We would we called it ringing [wringing] straw make straw brooms to sweep the floors. Our yards we kept the grass and weeds hoed out. We would sweep them every week. We would get dogwood branches make the yard broom. We planted flowers in the yards. We didnt have hot water heaters or electricity. Our floors didn't have any carpet

just bare floor. We had what we called shuck mops. Was wood with big holes in it and handle. We filled them holes with dried corn shucks used lye soap scrub the floors. They would be so pretty and clean. We made soap. Drip the lie [lye] from hickory aches, use some meat fat. We used meat fat to make it firm. We would cook the soap in wash pot. Shampoo was something we didn't We would wash our head with soap. Since we didn't have running water we would take our bath in wash tub. As the old saying goes where there is a will theres a way. We would make corn cob dolls. We would put white cloth over the cob for the head. Then use cloth around them for clothes. Arthur would play doll with us and then we would play something he wanted to play. I guess that was fair enough.

We used to tie the old ragweed across the trail call the other one to come quick. When we hit where was tied we would really get a fall. We would take our home made wagons to hill in the woods ride down. We had to be saving with nails. They would come apart. We would make what we called flying Jennies—cut tree down, put big nail in piece timber, drive it in the stump, one get on each end of timber and go round and around. Sometime the nail would come out we would would get a fall. When they found we was doing that they put a stop to that. We would make see saws.

When the farmers would get through gathering their crops they would turn their cattle out. We would have to get out hunt the cows about milking time. We had one cow with bell on. One afternoon Christine and myself heard a cow bell we thought was our cow bell. We wasnt paying any attention where we was going just going toward the bell. We got lost. It wasn't our cow. There was a man getting wood up in his wagon for fire was old saw mill road. I ask him where that road led to. He didnt say a word. That really

frighten us. We could hear an old bull coming toward us. We thought he was tracking us. He was bellowing every step. We took off running fast as we could. We came to a branch. We couldn't jump it. We took off our shoes waded the branch took off again. We finally come to the main road. It was getting dark then. We stoped long enough put our shoes on. The weather was cold. I said I would never follow another cow bell. They used to send me to store. Would be a long way no houses on the way. I would be scared by my self. I was small then. I would see old stump beside the road. I would think it was dog maby a mad dog—that was what we called rabbid dogs them days. I would just keep going scared. One time I was along going to the store an old peacock hollared. I didnt have any choice but to go on but was I scared--- first time I ever heard peacock hollow. Arthur and my self went to store one time was an old cigar but [butt] laying beside the road. Arthur said I bet you wont chew that cigar but. I didn't have any idea would make be sick but I found out the hard way. We was dressed to go to church that night the family was all going. My mother thought was some thing bad the matter. After I got over being sick I wanted to go but we couldnt tell her so we didnt get to go to church. Arthur was all time getting me in trouble.

Back in my young days the doctors and mail carries used buggys. Ops I forgot tell you we didn't have radio when I was small. No television, no cars on the roads—just buggys, wagons. We had no paved roads. In rurial districts the roads would get so muddy the old wagons would get stuck on some roads. In towns they had what they called hitching post for the horses and mules. People would walk long way visit friends and families spend the day. They would have house coverings. We had lot cane one yr. The neighbors came one night helped strip the sugar cane. They would build up big fires.

Would be cool. Also for light to work by. We had syrup mill to grind the juice and furnace to cook the syrup. I was small but look like fun to feed the syrup mill. I wanted try feeding the mill to grind the juice. My daddy found out I could so I had a job. Just about more than I could handle. The yellow jackes [jackets] was all around for the cane juice. We used to go to the creek where there was a deep hole of water. Take an old trunk, get in the trunk float around. I almost learned to swim but my daddy found out what we was doing. We had to quit going there.

We moved to West Point. I went to work there. I wasnt old enough but you didnt have to have a birth certific them days. We lived there while then moved to south Ga on a farm. We grew cotton, corn and peanuts. We didnt have peanut harvesters then. We had peanut pickers. We had what we called stack poles would put poles in the ground. Nail we called them slats to the poles. They would plow them up, we would toat peanuts, stack them around the poles with peanuts next to the pole. Keep them off the ground where the air could get under them so they would dry. We would have to get them up when they got ready. If we didn't the peanuts would come off in the ground. We would work from early until late. Would take about two weeks. We made over twelve tons peanuts one year and cotton. That was most disgusting thing to me. We would pick cotton, look back next day look like it needed again.

Christine and me went to Alex City got a job. I met John, we got married in 1930. We both was working, then the depression hit. We had bought our furniture. Jobs began to play out. We had to let our furniture go back. We moved in house with Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson. Wasn't any jobs to be found. Hutch was born while we lived there. We moved out when Hutch was about six mo old. Moved on a farm belong to Mrs.

Hutchinson—her inheritance. We used cooking stove. John paid two gallons of syrup for it. You know it was something. We slept on mattress filled with straw. Hutch had a cradle. We cooked in lids [?]. Just wasn't any money to be had. John help other people gather crops. We moved up there in the fall. He taken pay in syrup or peas or whatever they worked with. They didnt have any money eather. Next spring we farmed. We had real nice garden that year but we didnt have the money to buy fruit jars to preserve it. It was really hard times. We moved down to the Old Hutchinson place. John worked little along at Hog Mountain mines when some one wanted to be off. We was living there Hutch second Christmas. He didn't even get as much as a stick of candy. That was heart breaking to me but was the best we could do.

Our mule died after we moved down there. The mule was in such pain with spasamatic colic. We had open hall to the house. The mule came up went through the hall. The floor wasnt right on the ground. It like to have scared me to death. John had gone for help to docter the mule. He [the mule] came through the hall. He was in such pain he didnt know what he was doing. He died that night.

We used to go possom hunting. We would wrap Hutch up. We would sit down wait until the dogs treed them then go to them and after Edna came along we would take both of them hunting and fishing. Was big creek on the Old Hutchinson farm. When it rained lot the water would cover the ground. The whole place around there look like an ocean. No one lived near us. That place was really the jumping off place.

We made Hutch shoes out of old felt hats. Hutch didn't get a pair of shoes bought until after he was two yrs old. Edna was born in Jan. We had two babys. Hutch was two yrs old. I would have to toat the water from the spring. Have to let Hutch go with me. I

couldn't let him stay at house. Edna tiny baby them days. We had to wash diaper. We didn't have throw away diapers like they have now. I had toat water for the laundry. John went to work finally at Alex City. He went back and forth for a while. Then we moved to Alexander City. John had regular job. Then we bought five acres land. My Daddy give us old house. They tore it down build us a small house. John Douglas was born at Alexander City before we moved to the house out from Alexander City. Robert was born there. We sold that and moved to Opelika Ala. Then bought land about 7 miles from Auburn. During the war [WW II—1945] we couldnt get some things then. Things like transformers to have electric for a while. You all would pull the car up close to house listen to Grand Ole Opra on radio. But thing soon changed. Jane was born there. We had some hard times and some good times but it was